Book Review
Makram Rabah (2020) *Conflict on Mount Lebanon. The Druze, the Maronite and Collective Memory.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 317 pp., ISBN 978-1-4744-7417-7

Przemysław Gasztold

p.gasztold@akademia.mil.pl

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4137-006X

Department of Security Threats, War Studies University, Al. Gen. A. Chruściela "Montera" 103, 00-910, Warsaw, Poland

Historical Research Office, Institute of National Remembrance, Janusza Kurtyki 1, 02-676, Warsaw, Poland

The civil war in Lebanon in 1975–1990 is regarded as one of the bloodiest conflicts of the Cold War era and still has a strong impact on the country's fragile stability. It's no surprise then that various aspects of the conflict have been extensively studied by scholars representing different fields and expertise (Farha, 2019; Hermez, 2017; Lorentzen Sogge, 2021; Marusek, 2018). Although the war was used to some extent by foreign actors as a proxy conflict (Sozer, 2016; El Boujemi, 2016, pp. 147–148), the circumstances of the outbreak of violence had mostly internal roots. The book by Makram Rabah, a lecturer from the American University in Beirut, sheds new light on the course of the events looking at the conflict from the perspective of the Druze and the Maronite Christians, the two founding communities of modern Lebanon. By putting the collective memories of both groups at the centre of the narrative, the author deconstructs the origins and background of their conflict over Mount Lebanon, also known as the War of the Mountain (*Harb al-Jabal*), which ended in a bloody violence and Maronite defeat.

While examining the roots of the conflict, Rabah underlines the pivotal role of the 'past' that was exploited by leaders of both communities during the Civil War. He argues that a certain vision of history was being re-designed and used by political leaders and clergy from the Druze and Maronite communities and served their political, social and military purposes. The "collective memory" was also used to unify and solidify both communities, as well as to justify and to legitimise often violent acts. Rabah draws extensively from the memory studies, although his book also describes the sectarian struggles for the interpretation of the pasts. Although the author does not apply the concepts of 'politics of history' or 'politics of memory' (Behr, 2017; Maurantonio, 2017; Stryjek and Konieczna-Sałamatin, 2022), the Druze-Maronite quest for shaping their own "collective memories" fits perfectly into this framework. "Politics of memory" might be defined as particular perception or vision of the past which serves to achieve specific objectives, where historical truth or factual accuracy is of secondary importance (Kącka, 2017, p. 216). The term 'politics of memory' is frequently used in the research into how states and their institutions deal with the past, especially in Eastern Europe (Etges *et al.*, 2018).

The book, however, goes beyond the framework of memory studies and contributes significantly to the studies of the Civil War and, overall, to Lebanon's recent history. Firstly, it looks at issues from a local perspective which is very often omitted in such Cold War studies (Bradley, 2010, pp. 464–465). While Western and East-European archives are mostly easily accessible and contain many records about the diplomatic or intelligence ventures in the Middle East, the Lebanese archives possess only fragmented, uncatalogued collections which are mostly unavailable to scholars (Rabah, 2020, p. 23). In order to bridge this gap, the author managed to use private and semi-private archives and documents collected by the Progressive Socialist Party and the Bashir Gemayel files now stored at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik. Additionally, the book contains unique and fascinating photographs of people involved in the conflict which come from private sources. Secondly, thanks to many interviews conducted with people from the Druze and Maronite communities, Rabah not only gives a local perspective about the conflict over Mount Lebanon, but foremost personal experiences which are then examined from the broader perspective of 'collective memory'.

The book is divided into eight chapters and the first includes a thorough explanation of sources, methodological tools, interpretations and perceptions of "collective memory," as well as dealing with the shortcomings of oral history. The author argues that this method might come in handy both in reconstructing certain events and in shedding new light on some well-known episodes and interviews people who were involved in different sides of the conflict that could also heal old wounds (Rabah, 2020). Such interactions with witnesses of tragic events might help them to re-work the past by telling personal stories which would not be forgotten and later embraced more broadly in the framework of 'collective memory.' In the following chapters, Rabah discusses the origins of the different Druze-Maronite interpretations of history. Therefore, the narrative goes back to ancient times, the medieval period and up to the 20$^\text{th}$ century, where the roots of the Civil War are examined. The book offers a history of Lebanon through the lens of the Druze and Maronite communities, their fears, aspirations and conflicting interpretations of the past. Moreover, the political agenda, the motives for certain decisions, and especially the role played in both communities by Walid Jumblatt and Bashir Gemayel are significantly embedded within the book's narrative.

Although some issues which are underexposed in Rabah's work have already been pointed out by Thomas Scheffler (2021, pp. 54–55), there are also some questions which might be raised in order to better understand the complexities of the study. Firstly, one might

look deeper into the foreign actors and how they influenced local interpretations of the past. For example, the Progressive Socialist Party maintained close relationships with the Soviet bloc which was embodied by inter-party contacts, military support and scholarships provided by Moscow (Rabah, 2020, pp. 154–155; Katsakioris, 2021, p. 606). The Kremlin's 'junior' allies such as Poland also maintained some ties with the PSP, used to sell them weapons and hosted its students. How did such fruitful links influence the perception of the 'enemy'? Did Marxist-Leninist ideology have any impact on the local perception of Lebanon's history? To what extent did the Communist influence exerted on Druze students shape their imagination of the past? Secondly, although the book puts the Druze-Maronite 'collective memories' at its centre, other groups involved in the Civil War also shaped their local 'remembrance' agenda, including the Shia Amal and Hezbollah movements. Did such groups also apply similar tools in order to describe the past and unite their communities? Despite those remarks, Rabah's book significantly enhances our understanding of the roots and causes of Lebanon's internal conflict and sets valuable directions for further research. The book will be very useful for political scientists, historians and scholars working on Lebanese history and for Middle-Eastern Cold War studies.

Disclosure statement

The author is an editor of Security and Defence Quarterly.

References

Behr, V. (2017) 'Historical policy-making in post-1989 Poland: A sociological approach to the narratives of communism', *European Politics and Society*, 18(1), pp. 81–95. doi: 10.1080/23745118.2016.1269447.

Bradley, M.P. (2010) 'Decolonization, the global south, and the cold war, 1919–1962', in M.P. Leffler and O.A. Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge history of the cold war. Volume 1. Origins*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 464–485.

El Boujemi, M. (2016) 'La guerre civile libanaise: conflit civil ou guerre par procuration? 1970–1982', *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, 1(43), pp. 147–158. doi: 10.3917/bipr1.043.0147.

Etges, A., Zündorf, I. and Machcewicz, P. (2018) 'History and politics and the politics of history: Poland and its museums of contemporary history', *International Public History*, 1(1), pp. 1–12. doi: 10.1515/iph-2018-0006.

Farha, M. (2019) *Lebanon: The rise and fall of a secular state under siege*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108558846.

Hermez, S. (2017) *War is coming: Between past and future violence in Lebanon*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kącka, K. (2017) 'Politics of history: Creators, tools, mechanisms of action – The case study of Poland', in K. Kącka and R. Schattkowsky (eds.), *History and politics. Remembrance as legitimation*. CGS Studies, Vol. 6, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 211–229.

Katsakioris, K. (2021) 'The socialist countries, North Africa and the Middle East in the cold war: The educational connection', *Contemporary European History*, 30, pp. 597–612. doi: 10.1017/S0960777321000345.

Lorentzen Sogge, E. (2021) *The Palestinian national movement in Lebanon. A political history of the 'Ayn al-Hilwe Camp*. London, New York, and Dublin: I. B. Tauris and Bloomsbury Publishing.

Marusek, S. (2018) *Faith and resistance: The politics of love and war in Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press.

Maurantonio, N. (2017) 'The politics of memory', in K. Kenski and K. Hall Jamieson (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.026.

Rabah, M. (2020) *Conflict on Mount Lebanon. The Druze, the Maronite and collective memory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Scheffler, T. (2021) 'Review of Makram Rabah, conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites, and collective memory', *Bustan*, 12(1), pp. 49–56. doi: 10.5325/bustan.12.1.0049.

Sozer, B. (2016) 'Development of proxy relationships: A case study of the Lebanese civil war', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27(4), pp. 636–658. doi: 10.1080/09592318.2016.1189495.

Stryjek, T. and Konieczna-Sałamatin J. (eds.) (2022), *The politics of memory in Poland and Ukraine from reconciliation to de-conciliation*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.